

Tip Sheets: Weeding

Overview/Rationale

Weeding is an important aspect of collection development, not a colossal task to be avoided at all costs. Having "something" on a topic in your collection is not necessarily better than having "nothing," especially if it is outdated or incorrect information.

Even if all your materials are in good condition, timely, accurate, and circulating well, there will come a day when you run out of room on your shelves. You will have to decide what goes and what stays.

Weeding is a process that allows you to explore your collection and to learn its weaknesses and strengths. You can better serve your community and save yourself time by investing a bit of time in becoming familiar with your collection.

Procedures

Disclaimer - Check to see if your library has a policy or procedure for weeding. If it does, you will of course be following your library's guidelines.

There is more than one way to approach the weeding process.

Set up a schedule to systematically go through the collection to look at a different section at a time. As you examine the materials, decide what needs to be removed, what needs to be repaired, and what needs to be replaced. Also, determine if your collection is missing a part of a series or needs more materials in the subject area.

Another way to begin is to weed an area is when new non-fiction books are ready to be placed on the shelf. Check the Dewey number and look on your shelves for older books on the same subject.

Another way to weed is based on circulation. Books that have not been checked out in a specified number of years are removed from the collection. This criteria should be used carefully. Just because a book has not circulated does not mean it should be thrown away. Try as much as possible to keep information on many different subjects and view points.

Weed materials that are inaccurate, out of date or beyond repair. Evaluate that part of the collection looking for gaps. Do you have a complete series, do you have different points of view, are you missing a subject area?

Scientific information and current events are particularly subject to becoming out of date. These areas should be carefully evaluated for accurate and timely information.

Examine all books older than 10 years for general information and all books older than 5 years for scientific and technological information. We have all heard stories of libraries that still have books about what will happen when man goes to the moon. There are still some books that show pictures of computers as large as a room. This is fine for historical works, but not for books that are supposed to show the current state of affairs.

If a book is moldy, it must be removed from the collection, no matter how well it is used or how new it is. Mold is a living organism that will grow and spread to other books in the collection and cause health issues. Books with mold should be removed from the building as quickly as possible. Moldy books are not given away, boxed up or saved for a book sale. Wash your hands after touching a moldy book in order to prevent spreading the mold to other parts of the collection.

The **CREW method** describes five basic steps - inventory, collection evaluation, collection maintenance, weeding and discarding - which are involved in the ongoing process of "Continuous Review, Evaluation and Weeding" The basic formula for this method still applies when evaluating materials. [link to the CREW Method](#)

Another method for weeding is **MUSTY system** or five negative factors for considering the materials for weeding.

M - Mislead

If materials are factually incorrect or inaccurate they should be removed from the shelf.

U - Ugly

Unattractive, frayed covers do not inspire children to read what is inside. Mend books that cannot be replaced, replace those that you can. Books and tapes or books and CD in bags that are broken or worn should be repackaged. Anything in your collection that is unsightly should be attended to.

S - Superseded

If there is a newer edition of a book available, you should replace the older one on the shelf. If you already have the newer edition weed the older one, especially if it is a book of science or current events. Exceptions may include older editions of bibliographic guides such as **Children's Catalog**, or almanacs and the **Guinness Book of World Records**.

T - Trivial

Materials with no discernible literary or scientific merit should be removed. This may be more open to interpretation than some of the other criteria, but particularly in non-fiction categories, do not clog your shelves with materials that have no clear purpose.

Y - Your Collection

This is the hardest one to do because you need to know your collection and your community. It takes time to develop this knowledge, but it is crucial. Examine you

collection extensively and decide if the book fits with the priorities you and your library have set.

Your fiction collection will need to be weeded also. Circulation and wear and tear are generally the criteria used when examining the fiction collection. However, you may decide to keep materials by a popular author, local authors or classic literature regardless of circulation counts. Consider the library service goals - Will you keep older materials or only current materials?

To Replace or Not to Replace

The materials are supposed to be available, but they are not on the shelf. Make a note and based on what you know of your collection and your community decide if the item should be replaced or marked missing.

Once you have decided what materials should be weeded, you will need to follow the procedures of your library system with regards to removing the information from the library catalog so they do not accidentally find their way back into your collection.

After the materials are withdrawn, your library or your Friends group may wish to go green and recycle, and reuse the collection. Materials that are broken, physically filthy, and missing parts should be thrown away. Other items may be sold or given away. Options for green weeding may be found at <http://greenweeding.pbwiki.com>

Links

Resources

CREW Method

Is found at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission Website

<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/pubs/crew/>

SUNLINK Weed of the Month Club

<http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed/>

This site provides a plan for weed a subject area of your collection each month. It offers overview of the subject and a list of books which should be discarded.

Greenweeding

Options for discarding books may be found at

<http://greenweeding.pbwiki.com>

This above article is based on **Children's and Youth Services Staff Handbook** et al Elaine M. McCracken published by Georgia Public Library Service in 2002. Used with permission

From the Trenches - Enid Costley's Experience

Weeding the library's children collection took place in late December and January. I had no particular reason for doing weeding in the winter, it just worked out that way. It was a time when things slowed down enough for me to examine the collection and January is a new budget year - so it worked well to examine the collection and set priorities for purchasing new materials. I picked an area of the collection to weed each year - picture books, juvenile fiction or nonfiction. I reviewed the CREW method for the area. Based on the CREW guidelines, I obtained a printout of books that had not circulated in a given number of years. Sometime I would have the library aides or volunteers make sure the shelves are in order before I began weeding, but this did not always happen. Armed with a treat, usually good chocolate, I wore comfortable clothes and gathered the following: a small cart, book ends, pad of paper, pen, Post It notes, cleaning cloth, cleaning supplies and a chair. I started weeding a shelf of books by removing all the books from the shelf. After dusting the shelf I began putting books back on the shelf. Each book was examined before being placed back on the shelf. Sometimes it was necessary to clean the cover of the book. Other times a Post It-note was placed on the book noting what needed repairing. Misshelved books were scanned through the computer system as being "returned" as they often were marked as missing in the library system. Notes were made on the note pad when I noticed missing gaps in the collection. As I weeded I also read the shelves, shifted books around and straightened the shelves.

The first year I did weeding I focused on content and condition. Pulling out the books and materials that were so old they were useless or provided inaccurate information. I also pulled books that were falling apart and had some books repaired. The following years I focused on circulation data and also pulled out books that were falling apart. The third time I went through the collection I was able to begin evaluating the collection. While I was weeding I looked at gaps in the collection. I used **Children's Catalog** to find the gaps in the nonfiction collection. I used award book lists and notable children's book lists as well as **Children's Catalog** to find gaps in the fiction collection. I noted if all the books in a series were purchased. I looked at my reference question log and noted if I had enough materials in the collection to answer the most asked reference questions.

I always set a goal of how much weeding I would do in a day. Sometimes it was a range of shelves or a section of shelves. The task was not done until the books to be repaired were checked out on the catalog "to the repair shelf" and taken to the area where the books were repaired. The books to be withdrawn from the collection were taken to the cataloger to begin their process of removing the books from the catalog, stamping withdrawn and boxing up the books. Only after all the books were taken care of and my cart was empty could I enjoy my much deserved treat of the day.